

# Plans for TOKYO 2019

Guest Curator: Tomoko Yabumae (Curator, Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo)

vol. 4 ミルク倉庫+ココナッツ mirukusouko+The Coconuts

scratch tonguetable



## Imagining the City from Within the Kitchen – The Works of mirukusouko + The Coconuts Tomoko Yabumae

mirukusouko + The Coconuts is a group of artists with specialist skills and techniques in fields ranging from electrical work to editorial design, civil engineering, architecture, and acoustics. While it is also possible to refer to them as sculptors, painters, musicians, and designers, such descriptions seem somewhat unfitting since the core of their work is to visualize the very technology that serves to establish it, rather than pursuing formalities of expression. Without having to revert to definitions advocated by Francis Bacon, there is no doubt an intention here to redefine the relationship between “art” and “technology” that were separated from one another in the process of conceptualization. To this day, the group has implemented various forms of technology in response to the resistance brought about by aspects that lie outside of themselves such as the conditions of the environment, composition of objects, and the consequences of things. “mirukusouko” (milk warehouse) in the first place is the name used to refer to their joint workplace, and thus their activities had begun by organizing and developing this space.

One of the activities for which the group attracted much attention was the *UNCONDITIONAL RESTORATION* (milkyeast, 2015) exhibition that took place in a 55-year old wooden building serving as the group’s gallery/studio space before it was scheduled for demolition (\*note). With this aged building as the setting, the series of exhibitions had focused on techniques of “restoration.” For example, a structure used for lifting a tilted beam is presented in a way that enables it to also be perceived as a three-dimensional work. Or, as a means of restoring the building to its original state, the extension part on the top floor is cut out in the shape of a boat. By indicating a horizon in which all spatial interventions carried out by the artists are regarded as a form of “restoration,” the opposing concepts of “creation” and “destruction” are suspended, creating an opportunity with the potential of updating even the concept of what defines an artwork.

At the same time, this project in 2015 was perhaps also a critical reference to the scrap and build movements that have since been implemented throughout Tokyo until today in anticipation of the Tokyo Olympics. In this series of exhibitions at gallery αM which reexamines the system of cities in Tokyo in 2019, mirukusouko + The Coconuts attempts to shed light upon this theme through cooking that is the oldest form of technology devised by human beings. Cooking, or in other words, the realm of “domestic affairs,” is a concept that is in contraposition to “governmental affairs.” In this respect, the kitchen that is installed in the gallery through their own hands, and the infrastructure that supports it, can be regarded as an analogy of urban mechanisms.

What is made and served in this kitchen are inventive creole-esque dishes that are inspired by multiple cultures. Cooking is a technique for controlling material changes, and is a medium that allows one to retrospectively consider various aspects of the city, such as resources, logistics, infrastructure, topography, and history. For instance, viewers learn the physical structure of cities through the composition of ravioli and croquettes. Vegetable scraps and reused cardboard boxes from Amazon are appropriated as a means to contemplate urban resources and garbage waste issues, while electrical infrastructure is referenced through a confit dish. A single saucepan is reused everyday to create dishes from different cultures, and it is in the context of such cooking that viewers are encouraged to turn their minds towards the multiplicity of cultures that is essentially comparable to the urban palimpsest. A substitute dish made with Konnyaku (jelly produced from devil’s-tongue starch) contemplates the anonymity of those living in urban spaces, and snacks and sweets serve as a key to reflect on colonial history, et.al.

Dishes that employ fermentation and bacteria, along with local climate conditions, present us with a model of energy conversion –something that has remained a consistent interest for mirukusouko + The Coconuts. The act of consuming this also means penetrating both the body and city, using the energy generated by the material changes in cooking as a medium. Through cooking we are able to experience the city as an extension of our own body. Unfortunately due to the nature of the venue, visitors to the exhibition are unable to feast on any dishes. Nevertheless, by reading the texts that expand on each recipe, we share the individual experience of eating while being suspended in our imagination –precisely as reflected by the kitchen that is installed in midair inside the gallery space. As a result, we begin to see the intentions behind their focus on creole-esque multicultural cuisine. From these dishes we are able to imagine within us another possible city where different cultures intermingle, are diverted, and essentially coexist.

When thinking about what technology is, its most significant feature is indeed its transmissibility, which is both repeatable and mobile. Through technology, people are able to travel and gain their freedom as individuals. The techniques of cooking are a prime example of this. In this sense, doesn’t the kitchen in the basement of the exhibition room come to present itself like a quiet place of personal resistance? Through cooking, people can also create communities that do not depend on politics, religion, or topography, just like the way mirukusouko + The Coconuts seek new means for collaboration through the exchange of skills and techniques. As a start, I’d like to take these recipes home and attempt to reproduce them in my own kitchen.

[Note] A series of group exhibitions jointly organized by mirukusouko + The Coconuts and Shinichi Takashima. Following a preliminary installment in April 2015, the exhibitions were held in a relay format over a period of two months under the title, *UNCONDITIONAL RESTORATION*.

### ●mirukusouko + The Coconuts

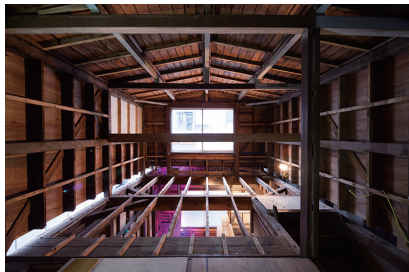
mirukusouko (Milk Warehouse) was formed in 2009. Due to the art unit The Coconuts having joined in 2015, currently there are seven members working as mirukusouko + The Coconuts. The members are Naotaka Miyazaki (b.1974), Naoki Matsumoto, Kota Sakagawa (b.1976), Eisuke Shinozaki (b.1980), Zenichi Tanakamaru (b.1984), Hiroaki Takiguchi (1974-2016), Takuma Nishihama (b.1978), and Naoki Matsumoto (b.1982).

Each member has specialized skills such as building techniques, electrical installation technology, editorial design, music, etc., coming together to form a medieval-guild-like organizational structure, which does not draw boundaries between artists and technicians. Their works are characterized by the discovery of potential functions of things and draws inspiration from the connection between tools and the body. From 2011 to 2016, they also ran an alternative space called “milkyeast” in Hatchobori, Tokyo, where they organized an held a series of exhibitions.

In 2017, they received Grand Prize from Art Award IN THE CUBE 2017 at “Gifu Land of Clear Waters Art Festival” , and the year before, received “3331 Arts Chiyoda Silver Prize” at 3331 Art Fair 2016–Various Collectors Prizes in 2016.

Their recent solo exhibitions include: “Chewing Machine” (2017 / S.Y.P. art space, Tokyo), “Inventory management is a running hot chariot.” (2016 / 3331 GALLERY, Tokyo), “mirukusouko’ s Traveling Kitchen” (worked as “mirukusouko” , 2011 / Roji to Hito, Tokyo). And their recent group exhibitions include: “TIMELINE: Multiple measures to touch time” (2019 / The Kyoto University Museum, Kyoto), “Art Award IN THE CUBE 2017, Gifu Land of Clear Waters Art Festival” (2017 / The Museum of Fine Arts, Gifu, Japan), Tokorozawa Biennial of Contemporary Art “Railroad Siding” (2011 / Saitama, Japan).

From 2013 to 2016, they also ran alternative space called “milkyeast” in Hatchobori, Tokyo, held some exhibitions and events at there including: “Self-Reference Reflexology” (2016), “UNCONDITIONAL RESTORATION” (2015), “milkyeast pub night—Inn, Tavern, Alehouse” (2015).



Installation View from the exhibition "UNCONDITIONAL RESTORATION"

Organizer: mirukusouko (2015)

Photo by Shu Nakagawa



Installation View from the exhibition "Inventory management is a running hot chariot."

mirukusouko + The Coconuts (2016)

From the back to the front: "A furniture and fixtures for Inventory management is a running hot chariot. (Book wheel type, following Agostino Lamelli)" "A furniture and fixtures for Inventory management is a running hot chariot. (Magazine rack type)" "A furniture and fixtures for Inventory management is a running hot chariot. (hardcover type)"

Photo by Azumi Kajiwara



"cranky wordy things"

mirukusouko + The Coconuts (2017)

Monitors, scales, paper bags, jars, pistachios, flasks, mallets, motors, PET bottles, polyethylene tanks, etc.

Photo by Azumi Kajiwara